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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the widespread use of journal keeping, divergent views of the process, and the dearth of formal attempts to study this process, this study determined the cumulative (post-28 days) and immediate (daily) effects of unstructured (journal) and structured (bipolar checklist) self-evaluative writing upon self-evaluation and self-actualization of male and female college students. Subjects were 78 (39 men, 39 women) college student volunteers, assigned to one of five groups. Pretests and posttests to measure cumulative effects formed a semantic differential to assess self-evaluation and the Personal Orientation Inventory to assess self-actualization. The daily semantic differentials of groups Jo-DSD and DSD were compared to detect the immediate effects of journal keeping upon self-evaluation. Major findings were that: (1) journal keeping did not yield statistically significant immediate or cumulative effects upon self-evaluation or self-actualization; (2) journal keepers rated themselves more in direction of freedom from conflict; (3) journal keeping effects are more likely to be immediate and transitory and cumulative; (4) structured bipolar checklist keeping may have a greater impact than unstructured journal keeping; (5) on a daily basis, men tended to evaluate themselves more positively than women; and (6) self-evaluations at pre- and posttesting were higher than during the intervening 28 days. (Author)

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JOURNAL KEEPING, SELF-EVALUATION, AND SELF-ACTUALIZATION

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Journal Keeping, Self-Evaluation, and Self-Actualization

Journal keeping is an ancient practice with a widespread popularity today. While the activity is by nature private, the use of such writing as an adjunct to psychotherapy and to the educational process has gained more supporters, especially during the present decade. Four books exclusively devoted to journal writing have emerged in the past three years alone. Though some criticisms of journal keeping have surfaced, the great proportion of comments about such writing are favorable. Yet to date, the empirical investigation of writing generally, and journal keeping more specifically, remains virtually untouched.

In my study, I chose to look at the cumulative and immediate effects of unstructured and structured self-evaluative writing upon self-evaluation and self-actualization with male and female college students.

Unstructured self-evaluative writing consisted of involvement for four weeks in daily journal keeping. Structured self-evaluation consisted of involvement for four weeks in filling out self-evaluative bipolar checklists daily, or Daily Semantic Differential keeping (see Table 1).

Self-evaluation was measured by the total score of a 15-item semantic differential assessing "the way you feel or see yourself right now." Self-actualization was measured by the two basic scales of the Personal Orientation Inventory, that is, Inner Directed Support

TABLE 1

DAILY SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL

spontaneous	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	planned
in conflict	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	not in conflict
confused	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	clear
relieved of tension	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	full of tension
I have no problems	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	I have many problems
little self-awareness	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	much self-awareness
tense	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	relaxed
like myself	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	dislike myself
emotionally expressive	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	emotionally unexpressive
interested	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	bored
concealing	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	revealing
indecisive	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	decisive
resolved	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	unresolved
anxious	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	at ease
active	_ _ _ _ _ _ _	passive

and Time Competence. Cumulative effects were assessed in terms of gains (inferred from adjusted posttest scores) and absolute changes yielded from pre- to posttesting.

The immediate effects, only of journal keeping upon only self-evaluation, were assessed by comparing the Daily Semantic Differential scores of one group which filled out only these daily bipolar checklists against another group which filled out these checklists after their daily journal entries. The immediate effects of journal keeping were assessed also in terms of day-to-day variability in self-evaluation scores on each of the 15 items of the checklist.

The experimental design to test the cumulative effects appears in Figure 1.

The experimental design to test the immediate effects appears in Figure 2.

The subjects were 78 students (39 males, 39 females) enrolled in introductory psychology at the University of New Mexico. A pretest-posttest control group design was utilized where students were randomly assigned to one of the following conditions (see Table 2):

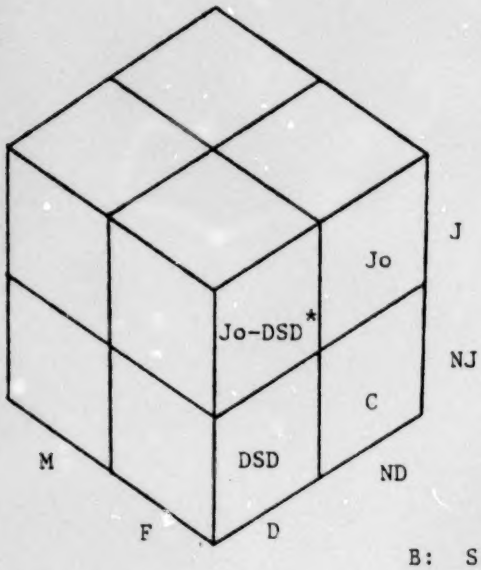
(1) Journal keeping alone group (Jo)

(2) Daily Semantic Differential keeping alone group (DSD)

(3) Journal with Daily Semantic Differential keeping group (Jo-DSD), and

(4) Control group (C).

Journal keepers were to devote at least ten minutes a day to



* cell groups:
Jo-DSD: Journal with Daily Semantic Differential keeping
Jo: Journal keeping
DSD: Daily Semantic Differential keeping
C: Control

A: Unstructured Self-Evaluative Writing (involvement or non-involvement with journal keeping: J and NJ, respectively)

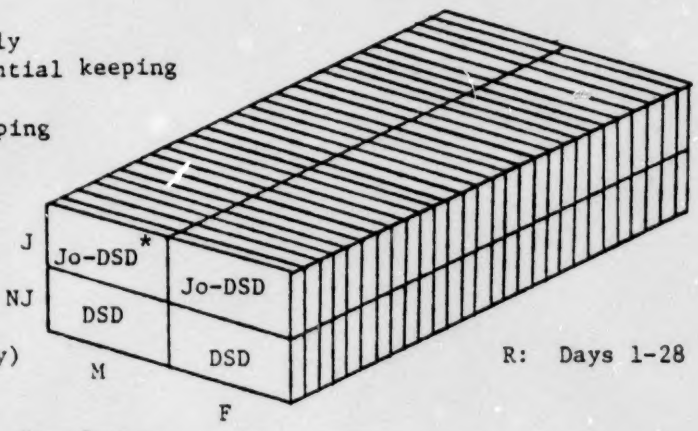
B: Structured Self-Evaluation (involvement or noninvolvement with daily semantic differential keeping: D and ND, respectively)

L: Sex (Male or Female)

FIGURE 1. DESIGN OF EXPERIMENT TO TEST CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

* cell groups:
Jo-DSD: Journal with Daily Semantic Differential keeping
DSD: Daily Semantic Differential keeping

A: Unstructured Self-Evaluative Writing (involvement or non-involvement with journal keeping: J and NJ, respectively)



L: Sex (Male or Female)

FIGURE 2. DESIGN OF EXPERIMENT TO TEST IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

TABLE 2

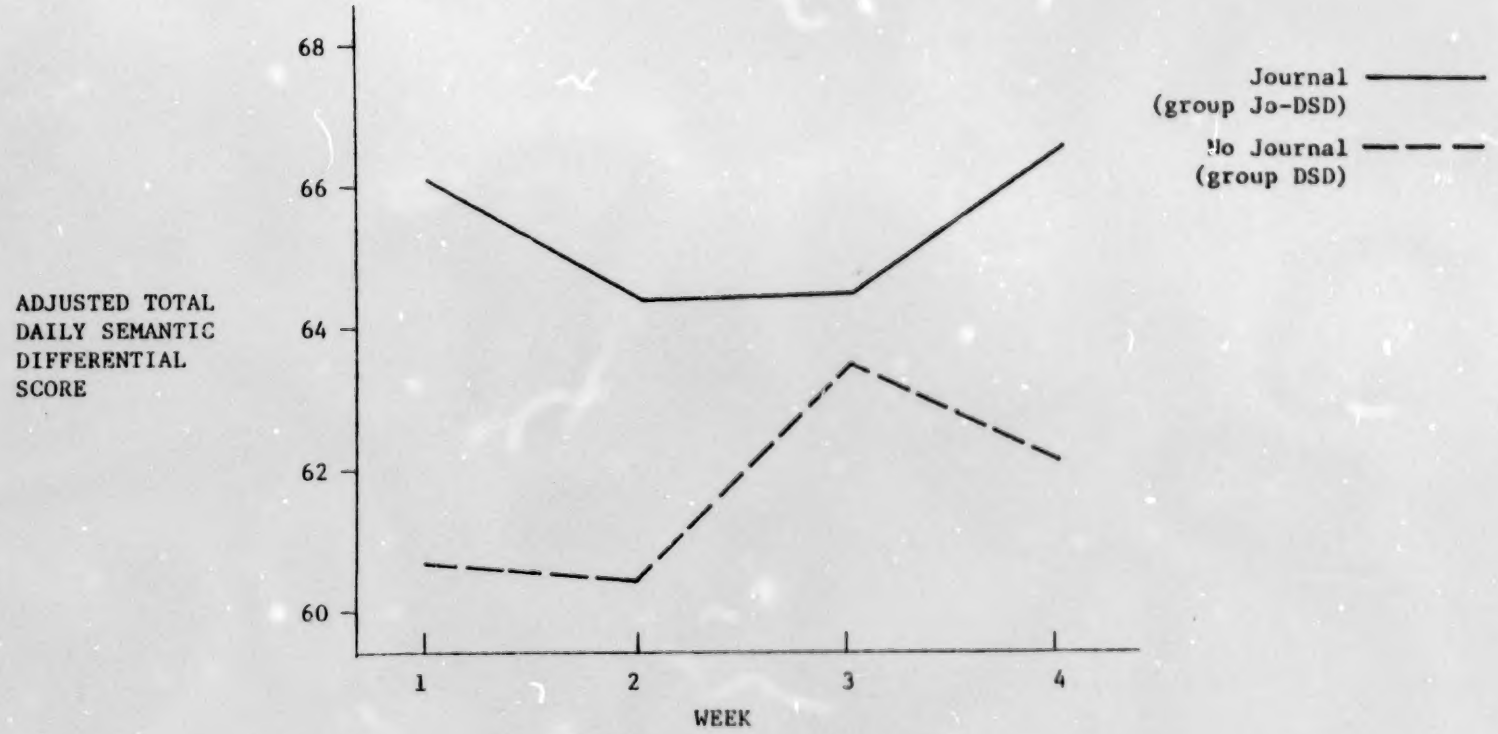
ADMINISTRATION OF TESTS AND TREATMENTS

Groups	Pretests	Treatments		Posttests
		J	D	
Jo	0	X		0
DSD	0		X	0
Jo-DSD	0	X	X	0
C	0			0

writing about their thoughts and feelings at the moment they were writing as well as to consider their thoughts and feelings on their days' events. They were assured that the experimenter would not read the content of their journals but that he would simply count the number of days no entries were made by having the students flip through their journal pages in the experimenter's presence at the posttest session. Students were not required to give their journals to the experimenter. Unlike previous studies it was the intention in this study to guarantee absolute privacy so that students might write without concerns of some eventual audience.

After 28 days, daily unstructured self-evaluative writing (that is, journal keeping) was not shown to yield statistically significant cumulative effects upon the main measures of self-evaluation or self-actualization. On three items of the self-evaluation measure, all which reflect the area of conflict, journal keepers rated themselves more in the direction of being "clear," "not in conflict," and "resolved" than non-journal keepers.

During the 28-day period, daily journal keeping was not shown to yield statistically significant immediate effects upon the main measure of self-evaluation. Though journal keepers had higher total daily self-evaluation scores across all four weeks (see Figure 3), these differences did not reach significance. Journal keepers obtained higher scores than non-journal keepers on those items reflecting greater disclosiveness and freedom from conflict.



Jo-DSD - Journal with Daily Semantic Differential keeping group
DSD - Daily Semantic Differential keeping alone group

FIGURE 3. ADJUSTED TOTAL SCORES OF JOURNAL KEEPERS AND NON-JOURNAL KEEPERS ON THE DAILY SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL BY WEEKS

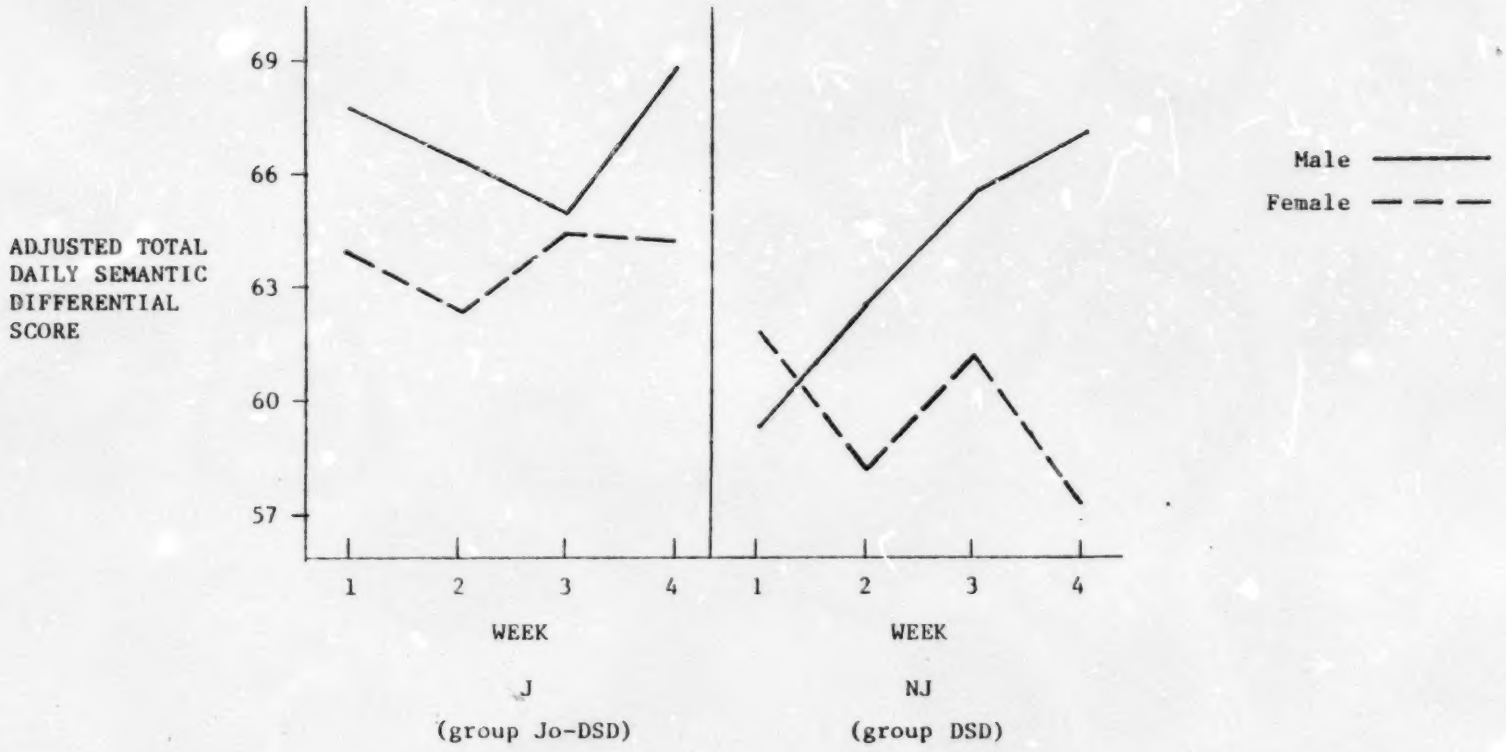
Differences between journal keepers and non-journal keepers were greater when measures of the immediate effects were compared than when measures of the cumulative effects were compared. This tentatively suggests that what gains journal keeping may yield are more likely to be immediate and transitory rather than cumulative.

Somewhat of an unexpected finding was that daily structured self-evaluation, that is, filling out the self-evaluative bipolar checklists, did yield statistically significant cumulative effects upon absolute changes in self-evaluation and, for women, changes in self-actualization. Among checklist keepers, women, as well, had greater gains in self-actualization than men.

As well, across the four weeks, men who filled out just the Daily Semantic Differential increasingly evaluated themselves more positively, whereas women did not (see Figure 4).

These findings raise the following considerations. First, that checklist keeping may have a greater impact upon the individual than journal keeping. The structured format of the bipolar checklist required the students to focus on their feelings and self-perception, contributing to these significant effects. Journal keepers, however, may have avoided focusing upon their internal states opting instead to log external events.

Another consideration is that the Daily Semantic Differential, ostensibly used to investigate the immediate effects of journal keeping, is an obtrusive measure. That is, the filling out of this



J - Journal: involvement in unstructured self-evaluative writing

NJ - No Journal: noninvolvement in unstructured self-evaluative writing

Jo-DSD - Journal with Daily Semantic Differential keeping group

DSD - Daily Semantic Differential keeping alone group

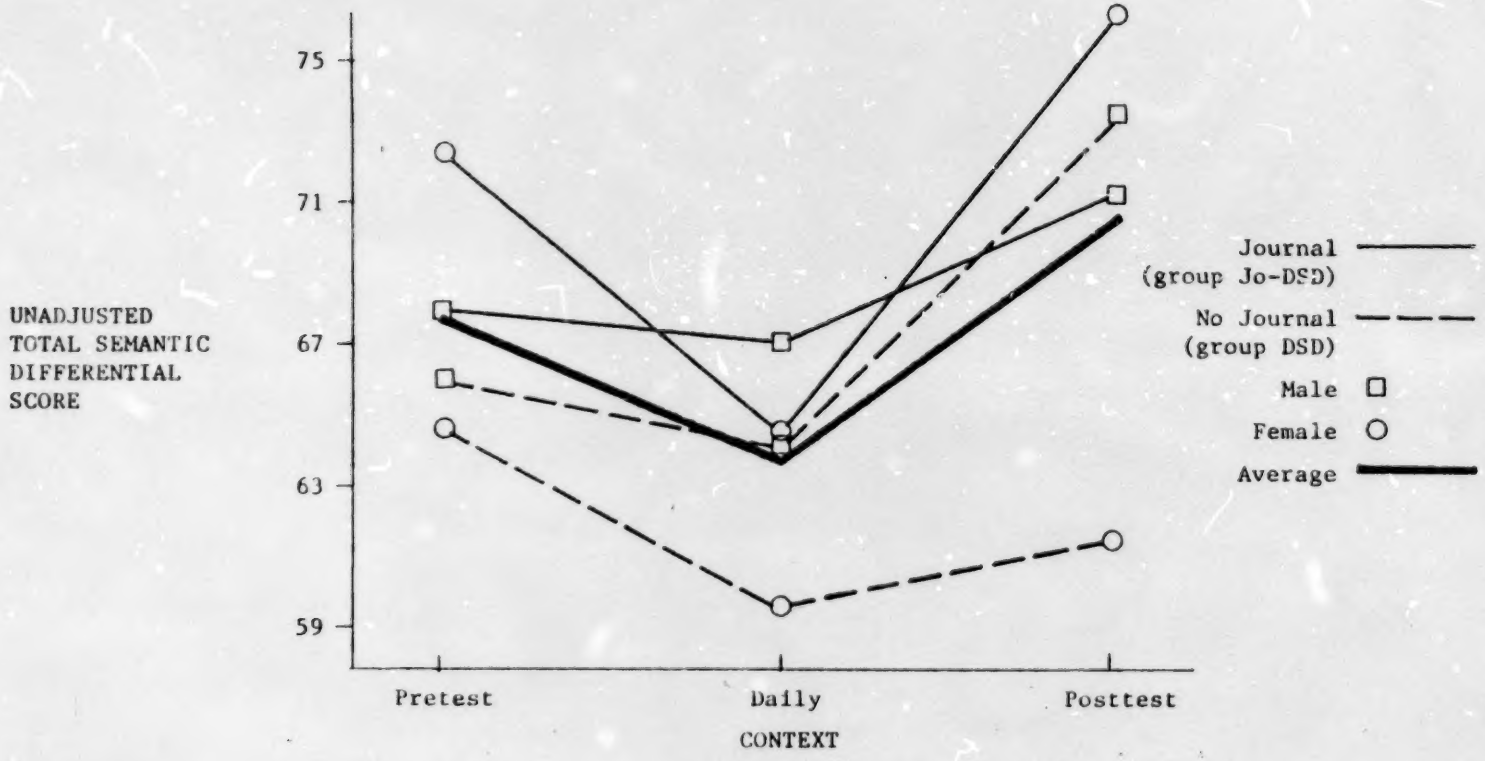
FIGURE 4. GROUP DATA FOR THE ADJUSTED TOTAL SCORES ON THE DAILY SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIAL BY WEEKS

dependent measure becomes, in itself, an independent treatment with its own immediate and cumulative effects. What have been described as the "immediate effects of journal keeping" in this experiment, then, might be more accurately described as the immediate effects of journal-<u>with</u>-checklist keeping. Less obtrusive measures are needed to more accurately assess the immediate effects of journal keeping.

In this study, women were more negative and more variable in their day-to-day self-evaluations than men. This may have been due to women's greater sensitivity to their more vulnerable states and to variations in their moods as well as to their greater willingness to admit to such states and variations.

A post-hoc analysis revealed that self-evaluations were higher during pre- and posttesting than during the intervening 28 days (see Figure 5). This may have been due to students' desires to "look good in front of" their peers (that is, fellow students participating in the experiment) and authority (as represented by the experimenter and the university lecture hall within which the tests were administered). It is suggested, as well, that solitude may enhance honesty and a willingness to concede one's more negative self-evaluations.

Of those who volunteered to submit their journals or offer comments about their participation in the experiment, most indicated that their involvement in self-evaluative writing (unstructured or



Jo-DSD - Journal with Daily Semantic Differential keeping group
DSD - Daily Semantic Differential keeping alone group

FIGURE 5. GROUP DATA FOR THE UNADJUSTED TOTAL SCORES ON THE PRETEST, DAILY, AND POSTTEST SEMANTIC DIFFERENTIALS

structured) was a positive experience. Both journal keepers and Daily Semantic Differential keepers cited increased self-awareness as an advantage to the process. Some involved in journal keeping saw journals as a means to express their feelings, particularly upsetting ones.

I have attempted to provide you with a summary of an experiment on the cumulative and immediate effects of journal keeping. As with any study, shortcomings exist. Perhaps most notable here is the time-length of the study. Twenty-eight days may be too short a duration to detect whatever cumulative effects the journal writing process may yield.

With the widespread use of journals today privately, clinically, and in educational settings, my hope is that other research will be attempted to further determine the impact of such writing. For whom is such writing best suited? For whom is it contraindicated? What effect does privacy have upon the process? Is it more beneficial to include or exclude a teacher's or a clinician's feedback on an individual's journal entries? These and other questions still need to be approached.

Thank you for your kind attention this morning.

for further information see: Baron, M.P. The cumulative and immediate effects of unstructured (journal) and structured (bipolar checklist) self-evaluative writing upon self-evaluation and self-actualization of male and female college students (Doctoral dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1978). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1978, 39, 1930B. (University Microfilms No. 7819274)